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# Ovid in Extremis

Frederick Smock

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FREDERICK SMOCK

*Ovid in Extremis*

Each and every morning  
a bare-breasted Nubian girl brought  
to his large balcony apartment on the Via Appia  
upon a small silver platter a selection of  
Greek pastries, phylo dough thin as gold leaf,  
chopped meaty walnuts, honey from the clover fields  
of Ilium. What did Rome know of such  
delicacy? After she had fed him the pastries,  
with her fingers or her toes, he and the girl made  
love six different ways. It was always a new  
girl, and six new ways of making love, every day.  
And this was just for breakfast. His motto:  
Indulge, but refine. He took down a sheaf  
of writing paper and penned upon her naked back  
verses to titillate the aristocracy and his many  
patrons. The words always came easy, and  
they always pleased—until that day Ovid awakened  
as from a dream to find himself on board the  
Black Sea Princess sailing out of the harbor,  
bound for the ends of the earth, the glorious past  
diminishing, his natal shore! He abandoned his  
stateroom, bowls of passionfruit, oranges from  
Seville dressed in diaphanous tissue, to stand  
upon the decks, the night sky sliding under the waves,  
the known world receding, exchanging the  
women of the court for women of the fields.